

1997 Talking Points Session Overview

At the start of the 105-day session of the state Legislature, most political pundits didn't give Republicans much chance for a productive term in 1997. After all, for the first time since 1913 the voters had sent a Democrat to the governor's mansion and elected Republican majorities in both the House and Senate.

Ours was a formidable challenge. The last time Republicans held an elected majority in both legislative chambers was 1954. We had to put our election victory behind us, develop a common-sense agenda and bridge a partisan division between the executive and legislative branches of state government that has no precedent in living memory.

Despite these obstacles, our efforts to make divided government work were a stunning success for the people of Washington. Legislative Republicans promised action on several major issues prior to the start of the 1997 session. Those promises were fulfilled with:

- ✓ Passage of a budget below the state spending limit that avoids future program cuts or tax increases
- ✓ Tax cuts totaling more than \$400 million
- ✓ \$600 million for enhancements directed to K-12 classrooms and state colleges
- ✓ Historic welfare reform that ends the failed federal entitlement and replaces it with a compassionate program based on personal responsibility and personal dignity, and
- ✓ Criminal code changes that put justice back into the juvenile justice system

AGENDA 1997

There's considerable resentment toward government as the 20th Century draws to a close. And most who serve in the public sector recognize that the public's beef with the size and intrusiveness of government is often justified. But most acknowledge that government has a legitimate role in shaping Washington's future... a limited role.

That's why the Republican legislative majorities are working to make government smaller, smarter, more responsible and more accountable.

Republicans never believed that if government wrote a big enough check, problems would disappear. We put our faith in the enterprising nature of each individual, the economy and the family as the most powerful engines for social progress.

As a majority party, we adhered to these principles in 1997.

BUDGET AND TAXES

Majority lawmakers forced Gov. Gary Locke to live within the state's sensible spending limitation law early in the session. The result was a \$19.07 billion budget that reflected the lowest state spending growth in 25 years (SB 6062 & HB 2259). Republicans approved a budget nearly \$100 million below the I-601 spending lid. And it was accomplished without resorting to fund shifts or gimmicks that would set up a fiscal crisis for future Legislatures.

We set the tone for the budget debate early in 1997 by pushing through two major tax-relief measures as our first order of business. Legislative majorities approved meaningful, long-term property tax relief totaling more than \$220 million (SB 5212/SB 5835/HB 1417). The proposal will appear on the November ballot as Referendum 47. Although the governor vetoed our original proposal to roll back B&O taxes to pre-1993 levels, GOP lawmakers fulfilled their

promise and delivered savings of \$94 million to employers in the state's service sector.

FUNDING EDUCATION FIRST

The people want limited government. They want government to spend less so they can keep more of what they earn. But they also expect government to fulfill its commitments. The state's foremost responsibility is providing an education for all children. So we renewed the state's commitment to a quality education for every student. And we didn't use it as an excuse to raise taxes.

- ✓We gave local schools \$40 million to purchase computers and other high-technology classroom equipment
- ✓More than \$275 million will ensure that all voter-approved school construction projects are fully funded
- ✓\$40 million will fund new enrollments at state colleges and universities
- ✓\$23 million supports financial aid for college students
- ✓\$55 million goes to work force training at community and technical colleges
- ✓We provided \$20 million for books and software, and
- ✓Almost \$300 million will boost pay to attract and retain the best teachers and college faculty

Because children learn to read through the third grade and read to learn for the rest of their lives, we also initiated new programs designed to boost reading at the elementary level.

WELFARE REFORM

Education is the key that unlocks the door to economic opportunity. But many of our citizens are locked out, unable to share in the benefits of our economy. Much of the fault for that lies in our welfare system. It suffers from what Governor Locke called "the fatal flaw of dependence."

We restructured welfare this year with a measure that replaces 60 years of false hopes with welfare reform that:

- ✓Ends welfare as an entitlement
- ✓Limits cash assistance to five years
- ✓Sets a goal to reduce welfare caseloads by 15 percent in two years
- ✓Makes child care available so parents can work, and
- ✓Forces teen parents to live with an adult

JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM

Those changes have been a long time in coming and put some common sense in our welfare system. Another stubborn problem that faced lawmakers in 1997 was the state's outmoded juvenile justice law. The 1977 Juvenile Justice Act gave children the privileges of adulthood but asked for none of the responsibility. What's worse, sentences established 20 years ago for juveniles don't fit the seriousness of their crimes, and parents have lost authority over their children.

Republican-sponsored juvenile justice revisions in 1997:

- ✓Sends more 16- and 17-year-olds accused of serious crimes to adult court
- ✓Transfers serious crimes committed as juveniles to an offenders adult record for consideration under the state's Three Strikes law

- ✓ Gives judges authority to force first-time offenders into treatment programs, and
- ✓ Increases penalties for dozens of juvenile crimes

The 1997 Legislature's record of accomplishment removed all doubt about Republicans' ability to be a governing majority. Guided by their principles, GOP lawmakers made divided government work and pointed to a new era of responsible, limited government.

#####